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THE EDITOR'S DIARY.

Women and the Decalogue.

ONE reason why women cannot readily obtain equality with men is that their natures instinctively demand inequality. It is our firm conviction that the great majority of cases of domestic infelicity are attributable to the woman's resentment of a suspicion constantly in her mind that she is deprived of much to which she is fairly entitled, by reason either of her conscious superiority or even of her mere desire. We surely had every reason to suppose that women, previously unenlightened upon the subject, would accept with gratefulness the assurance which we adduced from Holy Writ to the effect that they are not bound by the proscriptions of our fundamental religious law. Imagine, then, our surprise at receiving scores of letters breathing vehement protestation! Instead of rejoicing over their immunity, as men surely would do, they demand inclusion within the circle of human beings held by divine command to a strict observance of the Commandments. While necessarily recognizing the nobility of the disposition thus manifested, one cannot but wonder at its fatuity from the standpoint of practical application. We shall not attempt, at this time, to analyze the emotion, obviously peculiar to femininity, which induces such a feeling. Doubtless the attitude is explicable, but its assumption is so unexpected and itself so strange that much cautious inquiry and calm reflection are requisite to perfect understanding. As a preliminary to further consideration, however, we submit one of the many communications which we have received.

“ WASHINGTON, D. C.

“ SIR,—When a young girl I once asked my father at family prayers why, in the Tenth Commandment, it did not say, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's husband' as well as ' . . . thy neighbor's wife.' The fact that I grew up with six brothers as playmates and companions developed

in me rather early, perhaps, a spirit of good-natured emulation, and I expected, more than I desired, to be considered on an equal basis with them. My father, a Presbyterian Minister, by the way, gave me some answer which satisfied me perfectly at the time, and never in maturer years have I for one moment been troubled with any doubt lest Moses or the Giver of the law intended any slight to women by implying that they do not come fully under the provisions of the Decalogue. I do not remember the words my father used in his answer to me, but I was told, in effect, that the idea, and not the most exact expression of it, was the all-important thing. He cited various instances from the Bible and elsewhere in which for the sake of brevity or simplicity figures of speech are employed and are easily understood.

"I wish the Editor of the REVIEW would turn to the twenty-third chapter of Exodus and glance at the twelfth verse. Here is a reiteration of a part of the Fourth Commandment. Please notice the phrase 'the son of thy handmaid.' Nothing is said of the 'daughter of the handmaid' nor of the manservant and maidservant themselves. According to the Editor's way of reasoning as applied to the form of the commands of the Decalogue, the omission is significant and indicates that the son of the handmaid was not only the most important servant in the household, but that rest for him was of more consequence than even for the son and the daughter of the head of the house.

"For the sake of a little entertainment, just to see whether we women take them seriously or not, I think that the Editor's comments on the exemption of women from the prohibitions of the Decalogue are well worth while from a man's point of view, provided he has an abundance of leisure on his hands. But I think that women have never considered themselves any less under the 'penalty of the law' because Moses failed to be more explicit. Of course the 'thou' in the Fourth Commandment includes man and woman. It corresponds to 'the reader' or 'my hearer,' who is generally assumed to be of either sex. How superfluous it would be, in the Tenth Commandment, if the phrase 'thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's husband' were inserted. We might infer from the wording used that instances of coveting neighbors' wives were more common in Moses' time than coveting neighbors' husbands. However that may be, we do not always look for precision of language in literature, especially in so ancient a book as the Bible.

"In Professor James's handbook on Psychology, after dividing 'the self' into two aspects, the I and the Me, he says, 'In its widest possible sense a man's Me is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account.' I cannot imagine a woman feeling slighted because Professor James considers 'a man's Me,' nor her supposing for one moment that Professor James thinks a woman's self of no consequence because he addresses his remarks primarily to men. Imagine Professor James writing, 'A man's or woman's Me is the sum total of all that he or she can call his or hers,

not only his or her body and his or her psychic powers, but his or her clothes and his or her house, his or her wife or husband and children,' and so on throughout the book. Such a style would appear ridiculous and would exhaust the reader's patience.

"Probably, after all, the Editor did not expect to be taken seriously. Being a woman, I *was* a little angry at first, but the second time I read the article through I saw the Editor laughing at me just as plainly as could be, so I forgave him, because, I thought, being a man he 'must have his little joke.'

"CORA L. SNELL."

The passage in Exodus to which our correspondent refers is:

"Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest; that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."

This is one of the many amplifications of the Commandments made by Moses which are not regarded as having been fully inspired. Its particular reference obviously was to the son of the handmaid, as rest for the oxen and asses had already been enjoined explicitly. The head of the house, too, had been forbidden to require "any manner of work" from the stranger within his gates, but no provision had been made for the stranger's diversion. To meet the simple requirement of hospitality, this direction was given that he be "refreshed" or entertained in company with and presumably under the guidance of the son of the handmaid.

There was no inappropriateness in such an arrangement. Our correspondent errs in assuming that the son of the handmaid was a servant. His father was the head of the household, and his position was neither menial nor mean. It corresponded precisely, in fact, to that of Mormon children whose mothers are not first wives. Sarai established a custom when she voluntarily and most generously gave Hagar to Abram in order that the name might not become extinct. Subsequently she discovered that her magnanimous act had been unnecessary and was sorry, but meanwhile the willing Abram had taken the charming Egyptian girl to be his second wife, with Sarai's consent, and became the father of Ishmael, who has many descendants to this very day. The lad's social position was precarious for some time as a consequence of his mother's indiscreet boasting and Sarai's resentfulness, but was finally fixed definitely through divine interference and, when Abram was buried, Ishmael walked side by side with Isaac behind the hearse.

Whether Boaz was married when Naomi took Ruth to Bethlehem and directed her to proclaim herself the rich man's handmaid cannot be determined from the record, but circumstantial evidence clearly indicates that he had a wife who, in conformity with the Hebrew custom of that day and the Mormon custom of recent times, assented perforce to the addition of the attractive widow to the family when politely but firmly requested by her husband to do so. If so, then, of course, the great grandmother of David himself was a handmaid, in the Scriptural meaning of the term, and undoubtedly it was to such as his grandfather Obed that the injunction of Moses was meant to apply. It seems plain, therefore, that the omission from the verse in Exodus to which our correspondent refers is, indeed, significant and indicative of the verity of our original contention.

Whatever may be the view held by Professor James respecting the relative positions of the sexes, it surely does seem to be a fact that he "addresses his remarks primarily to men" and, unconsciously, perhaps, falls in with the ancient custom of regarding wives as property, in common with lands and horses. Our correspondent's illustration of redundant use of the possessive pronoun is, moreover, a wilful exaggeration and by no means convincing as evidence that a more explicit expression would "appear ridiculous" or should "exhaust a reader's patience." Indeed, there is nothing so refreshing, in these days of careless writing, as painstaking accuracy, although, of course, one should not approach the extreme of the illiterate person who emphasized his fidelity to the cause of complete sex evenness by distorting the familiar Latin adage into "*Mens et womens conscientia recti.*"